

**CHAIRMAN SKELTON, CONGRESSMAN SAXTON, AND DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE, THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO REPORT TO YOU TODAY ON THE STATUS OF OUR MARINE CORPS.**

**I HAVE PLEDGED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH FRANK AND HONEST ASSESSMENTS; I COME HERE TODAY WITH THAT THOUGHT AGAIN IN MIND.**

**FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS YOUR MARINE CORPS HAS BEEN IMMERSED IN WHAT WE BELIEVE ARE THE FIRST BATTLES OF A LONG WAR – A GENERATIONAL STRUGGLE AGAINST ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS. THE MARINES IN OUR OPERATING FORCES ARE BEING PUSHED HARD; STRAINED BY THE OPERATIONAL TEMPO AND THE FREQUENCY OF COMBAT DEPLOYMENTS – BUT THEIR MORALE HAS NEVER BEEN HIGHER – BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THEY ARE *MAKING A DIFFERENCE*. OVER TWO-THIRDS OF OUR MARINES HAVE ENLISTED OR RE-ENLISTED SINCE 9-11. THEY KNOW FULL WELL WHAT THE NATION EXPECTS OF ITS MARINES IN A TIME OF WAR, AND THEY ARE SHOULDERING THAT DUTY WITH SELFLESSNESS AND COURAGE.**

**THEY ALSO BELIEVE THAT THROUGH ITS ELECTED GOVERNMENT, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES ARE BEHIND THEM. THE EVIDENCE OF THAT SUPPORT IS EVERYWHERE – TANGIBLE SUPPORT IN THE FIELDING OF NEW MATERIEL, THE LATEST EQUIPMENT TO PROTECT THEM WHILE IN HARM’S WAY, THE RESET OF THE FORCE TO ACCOMPLISH FOLLOW-ON MISSIONS THROUGHOUT THE GLOBE, AND MOST RECENTLY, THE PROPOSAL TO GROW OUR END STRENGTH.**

**INCREASING TO 202,000 MARINES WILL GREATLY REDUCE THE STRAIN BOTH ON THE INDIVIDUAL MARINE AND ON OUR INSTITUTION AS A WHOLE. THE END STRENGTH INCREASE WILL GRADUALLY IMPROVE THE DEPLOYMENT-TO-DWELL RATIO IN SOME OF OUR MOST CRITICAL UNITS. CURRENTLY, MANY OF THESE UNITS ARE DEPLOYED FOR SEVEN MONTHS AND HOME FOR ONLY SEVEN MONTHS—SOME EVEN LESS TIME—BEFORE THEY RETURN TO COMBAT.**

**OUR CORPS IS, BY LAW, “TO BE THE MOST READY WHEN THE NATION IS LEAST READY... THE NATION’S**

**SHOCK TROOPS.” THESE ADDITIONAL MARINES WILL ALLOW US THE DWELL TIME NEEDED TO TRAIN AND SHARPEN THE SKILLS THAT WILL BE REQUIRED OF US IN THE NEXT CONTINGENCY – THEREBY REDUCING FUTURE OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC RISKS.**

**OVER 70 PERCENT OF OUR PROPOSED END STRENGTH INCREASE IS COMPRISED OF FIRST-TERM MARINES, SO WE ARE MAKING THE NECESSARY INCREASES IN RECRUITING AND RETENTION – THIS WILL BE A CHALLENGE. BUT, OUR STANDARDS WILL REMAIN HIGH. WE WILL NEED YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR ENLISTMENT BONUSES AND OTHER RECRUITING PROGRAMS, SUCH AS ADVERTISING, WHICH ARE ESSENTIAL FOR US TO CONTINUE TO BRING ABOARD THE BEST THAT AMERICA HAS TO OFFER.**

**TURNING TO THE PLUS UP OPERATIONS IN IRAQ, WE HAVE APPROXIMATELY 4,000 MARINES AFFECTED. FIRST, I WOULD LIKE TO CORRECT THE MISUNDERSTANDING BY SOME IN THE MEDIA THAT OUR END STRENGTH INCREASE IS DIRECTLY TIED TO THE PLUS-UP OPERATION IN IRAQ. THIS IS NOT THE CASE --**

**OUR REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL MARINES IS SEPARATE FROM, INDEED, IT PRE-DATED BY SEVERAL WEEKS THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PLUS UP.**

**I ALSO WANT TO ASSURE YOU THAT ALL MARINES GOING INTO THE AL ANBAR PROVINCE WILL BE PROPERLY TRAINED. UNITS THAT HAVE BEEN ACCELERATED IN THE ROTATION HAVE INDEED HAD THEIR TRAINING SCHEDULES ADJUSTED, BUT THOSE SCHEDULES INCLUDE *ALL FIVE PHASES* OF OUR PREDEPLOYMENT TRAINING PACKAGE. THEY WILL BE PROPERLY EQUIPPED: WE HAVE IDENTIFIED THEIR ONLY EQUIPMENT SHORTFALL – WHICH IS A RESULT OF MANUFACTURER NON-AVAILABILITY – AND THOSE ARE THE LATEST GENERATION SNIPER AND SPOTTER SCOPES.**

**LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, YOUR MARINES RECOGNIZE THAT THIS IS AN IMPORTANT TIME IN HISTORY TO SERVE OUR COUNTRY. THEY ARE TRULY A SPECIAL BREED OF AMERICA’S WARRIORS. IT IS ON THEIR BEHALF THAT I COME BEFORE YOU TODAY TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS, AND TO HELP ALL UNDERSTAND, HOW WE CAN BEST SUPPORT THESE**

**TREMENDOUS YOUNG MARINES AND SAILORS IN  
COMBAT. I LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR QUESTIONS.**